

WORTH A
DETOUR

NORTH ISLAND

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**Hidden places and unusual
destinations off the beaten track**

PETER JANSSEN



Contents

First published in 2019 by New Holland Publishers

Sydney • Auckland

Level 1, 178 Fox Valley Road, Wahroonga 2076, Australia

5/39 Woodside Ave, Northcote, Auckland 0627, New Zealand

newhollandpublishers.com

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of New Zealand.

ISBN 9781869665265

Group Managing Director: Fiona Schultz

Publisher: Sarah Beresford

Project Editor: Elise James

Designer: Yolanda La Gorcé

Production Director: Arlene Gippert

Printer: Toppan Leefung Printing Limited

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Dedication

To all the dedicated volunteers without whom New Zealand's human and natural history would be much diminished.

Acknowledgements

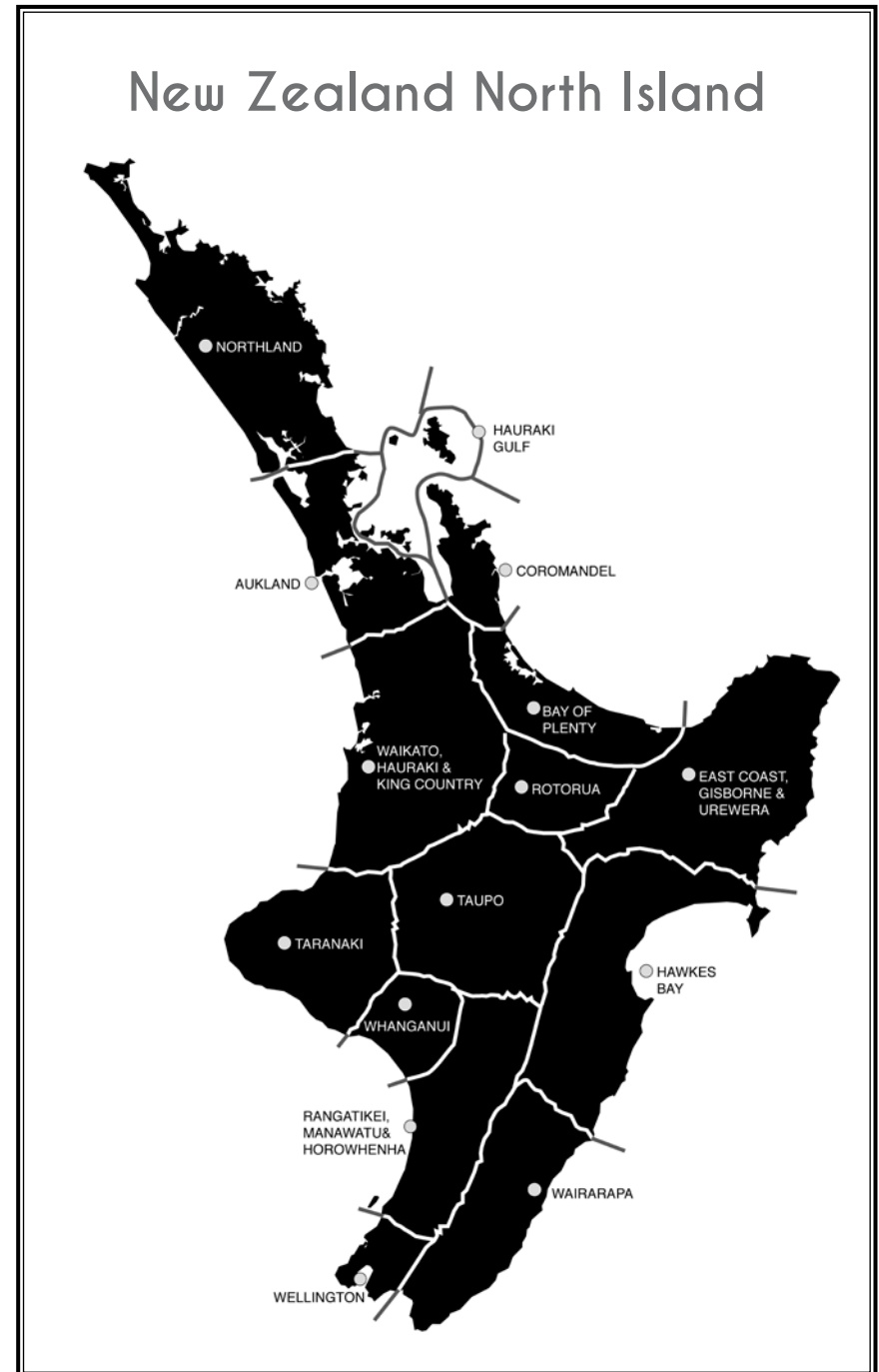
Without all your helpful suggestions this book would have been much shorter. Thank you.

Helen Adams, Winton Bebbington, Kevin Brewer, Rose Carson, Melissa Carson, Grant Hadfield, John Haig, Susan Holmes, Lloyd Houghton, Harry Janssen, Lyn Janssen, Teresa Janssen, Dora Moffit, Jonathan Pierce, Sarah Raman, Peter Rickard, Nick Seaman, Katrina Smith, Wilma Smith, Alison Southby.

Introduction

Over the past few years while researching a number of guidebooks I have travelled just about every road and visited every town and hamlet in New Zealand. I have enjoyed finding the more offbeat attractions, the quirky places bypassed by most travellers and the eccentric characters that have been great stories to tell. Even now I am finding plenty of new places and it's hard just to know when to stop. Many of the places are well known locally, but are unknown to a visitor who is frequently short on time. Even our bigger cities have corners and places that remain unexplored by most. This book is a varied collection of the places throughout the country that I think are worth a small detour. There is something for everyone (I hope), from a taxidermy collection and homemade baking, backcountry pubs to old time wineries, through to empty beaches and obscure country roads.

By its very nature a book of this type comes down to personal choice, but I trust through experience that the choices are good ones, though I'm more than ready to hear about other places I might have missed.



NORTHLAND


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39. Utopia Café, Kaiwaka

1. Cape Reinga

In the middle of the summer Cape Reinga can be so packed with visitors, that the magnificent scenery is often diminished by the crowds, yet there are two unique features that are frequently overlooked.

In Maori tradition Cape Reinga is the final departing point for the spirits of the dead on their journey to the underworld domain of Hine-nui-te-po, the goddess of death. The twisted and gnarled vegetation along the coast is where the spirits have desperately attempted to cling to this world. Right at the point is a small battered pohutukawa named Te Aroha clinging to the rocks just above the water. What it lacks in size it more than makes up for in importance, as this tree is the entrance to the world of Hinenui-te-po, the Goddess of Death. Once the departing spirits reach this tree, they use the gnarled roots as steps to make their way down to the sea and the door to the underworld. In Maori, a gentle way to say someone has died is to say they 'have slid down the pohutukawa root'. Said to be over 800 years old, tradition has it that in all those years, the tree has flowered only once.

The other special place is Te Werahi Beach. From the carpark, packed with tour buses where the track leads down to the lighthouse, there is another, seldom used track which leads in the other direction. Only forty-five minutes walk away is Te Werahi Beach, where there is every chance you will find yourself alone. This wide sandy beach on the western side of the cape directly faces the wild Tasman Sea and is frequently exposed to strong westerly winds and rolling surf pounding in from the open ocean. It is a wonderful wild place away from the crowds, and even better the track down to the beach winds along spectacular coastal cliffs that drop hundreds of metres to the rocks below, before dropping into sheltered valley that leads to the beach. The salt-laden spray from the wild waves produces bonsai like manuka, and diminutive pohutukawa.

 At the very end of SH 1

2. Bartlett's Rata

New Zealand's rarest native tree, Bartlett's rata is found at Te Paki on the Te Aupouri Peninsula. Just thirty-four trees in three bush remnants survive in the wild and were rediscovered in 1975 by Auckland schoolteacher John Bartlett in Radar Bush near Cape Reinga. The local iwi Ngati, of course knew of the trees and named them rata moehau, 'the big rata asleep on the hill'.

Like northern rata, this tree usually starts life as an epiphyte high in the branches of a large host tree and can grow up to 30 metres in height. In contrast to the other two rata species, it has white flowers instead of bright crimson and fine, paper-like bark that flakes easily, rather than the rough, tough bark of its common cousins.


One theory for the difference is that this species developed in isolation when these volcanic hills were once an island, separated from the mainland for long periods of time in the way, today, offshore islands are home to subspecies of native flora and fauna. The area was once covered in the dense forest, but only isolated patches of bush have survived the arrival of humans and the subsequent clearing for agriculture and timber. The flaky bark may have also helped the tree to survive bush fires set to clear the land for crops and grass.

The track to the tree is signposted to the right on the road between Waitaki Landing and Cape Reinga. It begins as a 4WD track and after about twenty minutes a smaller track branches off to the right. At 300 metres is a gate. Take the track to the left and this follows a ridge dropping steeply downhill. The track is muddy and not well formed. It ends by a single large kauri tree behind which are two specimens of Bartlett's rata. Do not take seeds or cuttings.

3. Te Paki Sandhills


Huge sandhills reminiscent of the Sahara Desert are not an image that immediately springs to mind when thinking of the New Zealand landscape. At Te Paki massive sand dunes stretch from Te Paki Stream to

Te Werahi Beach, in places reaching as high as 150 metres. The light gold sand blends with the yellowy-green dune-creeper pingao, which manages to take hold in the shifting sands. The best way to walk the sand hills is to start walking from the car park up the loose sand of the dunes. This is hard work; when you have had enough drop down to Te Paki Stream, which is both flat and shallow, and an easy walk back to the car park. Te Paki Stream serves as a major access route to Ninety Mile Beach, so keep an eye out for speeding vehicles. Sand-surfing on boogie boards is a popular activity here, and there are several places hiring out boards, including one right at the car park during the summer.

 Te Paki Stream Road, off the Cape Reinga Road.

4. Henderson Bay and Rarawa Beach

These two unspoilt beaches are just two among the many beautiful and often empty Northland beaches. What makes these two beaches special is that while they are only a couple of kilometres apart, the sand on the beaches is distinctly different. Henderson Bay is a magnificent long sweep of golden sand and, with its rolling breakers, is very popular with surfers. The sand at Rarawa Beach is a vivid white. The difference is caused by the variation in the amount of silica in the sand. Rarawa and the beaches north of here contain a high amount of silica, giving these beaches a dazzling white colour that on a summer's day will make you reach for the sunnies. The contrast between the white of the sand and the blue of the ocean is just stunning. If getting away from it all is what you are after, then both these beaches fit the bill perfectly.

 13 km north of Horohora to the Henderson Bay Road turnoff and 15 km to the Rarawa Beach turnoff. From the turnoff it is 6 km to the either beach on an unsealed road.

5. Ninety Mile Beach

Why this beach was named Ninety Mile Beach is a bit of a mystery as the beach is not even 90 kilometres long. If accuracy wasn't important, why not go the whole way and called it One Hundred Mile Beach? For the record the beach is just 54 miles or 88 km long. Precise distances aside, this magnificent sweeping beach has room enough for everyone. Ahipara Beach at the southern end is the most sheltered part of the beach and safest for swimming, while at the other end the giant Te Paki sand hills have become a firm favourite for sand surfing.

The beach is drivable for a few hours both sides of low tide, but only for the experienced. Check your insurance first as many car insurance companies, and nearly all rental car companies exclude off road driving from their policies. The annual Snapper Classic fishing competition is held on the beach in February each year for the heaviest snapper caught by surf casting off the beach. It is the biggest and most lucrative fishing competition of its type in New Zealand, attracting entries from all over New Zealand and Australia. Visit www.snapperclassic.co.nz

 There are numerous entry spots along SH 1 north of Kaitaia.

6. Gum Diggers Park

Located on an actual gum field, Gum Diggers Park is a fascinating insight into an industry unique to Northland. The kauri gum had a wide range of uses particularly as a high-quality varnish, but it was hard won by men working in difficult conditions. The footwear used in the extraction of the gum gave rise to the very Kiwi word 'gumboot'.

Workers in this gumfield included Dalmatians from the Croatian coast who first arrived in Northland in 1885 and by 1900 numbered nearly 5000. Many of these men worked hard, saved their money and returned

to their homeland, while others moved south to Auckland and became particularly influential in the wine industry, construction and fishing.

This gum field was based on two extinct kauri forests: the first forest may have declined owing to climate change 150,000 years ago, while the second forest was subjected to a more severe event such as a tsunami about 45,000 years ago. Information boards and reconstructions detail both the kauri gum industry and life on the gum field, and the trees in this park are said to be the oldest preserved timber in the world.





In addition to the old gum workings, Diggers Park has a small viewing platform so visitor can look out over the tops of the trees, and the park also breed Northland Green geckos that can be viewed in the Gecko House.

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-  171 Heath Road, signposted from SH 1 25 km north of Kaitaia
 -  Open daily 9 am to 5.30 pm. Summer months only.
 -  09 406 7166
 -  www.gumdiggerspark.co.nz
 -  Entrance fee.

7. St Jean Baptiste Anchor, Museum@Te Ahu/Far North Regional Museum, Kaitaia

While the voyages of Captain Cook are well documented, what is not so well known is that the French explorer Francis de Surville was exploring New Zealand at the same time as Cook. Considering that New Zealand was virtually unknown to European sailors it is incredible that at one stage both Cook's *Endeavour* and de Surville's *St Jean Baptiste* ships passed within a few kilometres of each other off North Cape in December 1769. At the time bad weather obscured visibility so neither captain was aware that the other was sailing in the very same waters. While sheltering in Doubtless Bay, de Surville was forced to cut both his anchors, and these were later recovered by diver and adventurer Kelly Tarlton. Rusted and a bit worse

for wear, but still impressive, one of these huge anchors is here at Kaitaia, while the other is in Te Papa, Wellington.


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-  Corner Matthews Ave and South Road, Kaitaia.
 -  Open October to May 8.30 am to 4.30 pm, Monday to Friday;
June to September 10.30 am to 4.30 pm Monday to Friday.
 -  09 408 9457
 -  www.teahuheritage.co.nz

8. Doubtless Bay and Rangikapiti Pa

Doubtless Bay, known to Maori as Rangaunu, was first discovered by Kupe who landed at Taipa around 900 AD and encompasses some of the best beaches of the north, including Coopers Beach, Cable Bay, Taipa and Taupo Bay. At the eastern end of the bay is historic Mangonui Harbour, once a thriving whaling station. Sheltering the bay to the west and north is the Karikari Peninsula at the end of which is Matai Bay, without question one of the finest beaches in the area.

Rangikapiti Pa overlooks both Doubtless Bay and inland along the Mangonui Harbour, and was the principal pa in this area. According to Ngati Kahu tradition, it was here that the voyaging waka *Ruakaramea*, commanded by Moehuri, first landed. It is now turned to stone and is still visible just below the pa at low tide. The name Rangikapiti means 'gathered together'.

The *Ruakaramea* was guided by a great shark across the open ocean to the safe harbour. To honour the shark, Moehuri not only named the harbour Mangonui (big shark), but gave orders that the shark was to be protected. Directly in opposition to his father's orders, Moehuri's son Tukiato and a group of friends killed the shark and, as punishment, Tukiato was expelled from the pa to the other end of Coopers Beach where he built the pa Otanenui.

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-  Between Coopers Beach and Mangonui turn off SH 10 into Mill Bay Road and then immediately left into Rangikapiti Road and the pa is at the end.

9. Whangaroa Harbour

The view from SH 10 of the tidal upper reaches of the Whangaroa Harbour doesn't tempt the passing visitor to make the effort of taking a detour, but the harbour has some surprises. In contrast to the upper reaches, towards the entrance the harbour narrows considerably becoming almost an enclosed fiord-like bay, surrounding by rocky peaks and bush-clad hills. Marine fossils found in the area date from the early Permian era (270 million years ago), making them some of the oldest fossils in the North Island, and rising sea levels over the last 5000 years flooded an older river valley to create the inland waterway.

The small settlement has a fine old pub and is the sheltered base for fishing boats. High above the town an old volcanic plug known as St Paul's Rock gives spectacular views over the harbour and out to Stephenson Island just beyond the entrance.

The origin of this rock has a lively Maori legend. Tararata was a handsome mountain, and being handsome he had two loving wives who took care of his every need. One day Maungataniwha, who lived to the west, and was both a taniwha and a mountain, asked Tararata if he could have one of his wives, as he was still single. Not only did Tararata refuse the request, but he laughed in his face and mocked the bachelor to such a degree that Maungataniwha swung his huge tail and whipped off Tararata's head with such force that it sailed over the harbour and landed on the hill now known as Ohakiri or St Pauls Rock. The headless Tararata still stands today as the flat-topped mountain to the west of Whangaroa harbour.

Tauranga Bay just beyond the entrance to the bay is a beautiful but isolated stretch of beach with just small huddle of baches and a camping ground.

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-  Whangaroa village is 6 km off SH 10, north of Kerikeri.

10. Matauri Bay

The long sweep of sandy beach fronting Matauri Bay (30 km north of Kerikeri) is largely undeveloped, and the bay is now best known as the final resting place of the Greenpeace ship the *Rainbow Warrior*, sunk first by French saboteurs in Auckland harbour in 1985. A monument to the ship is on the bluff at the northern end of the bay, while the ship itself lies in the clear waters between the beach and the Cavalli Islands. The *Rainbow Warrior* is now appropriately an artificial reef sheltering sea life, and a very popular diving spot.

📍 At the end of Matauri Bay Road, 17km off SH 10.

11. The Pear Tree, Kerikeri

Several towns claim to be New Zealand's oldest European settlements, but just what constitutes a settlement is certainly up for discussion and some claims are based on just a single person or family arriving to stay permanently in a given area. Working on the basis that a town can be founded by very few people, Kerikeri, settled between 1818 and 1822, is the front runner with two other Northland towns not far behind: Rawene (1825) and Russell (1829).

As well as building a house, establishing a garden and orchard was a high priority for the first settlers and these vegetable and fruit trees were especially valued by local Maori whose local plant diet was severely limited.

Pear trees are long-lived and it is not surprising the oldest surviving fruit tree brought by Europeans to New Zealand is a pear. Once part of a much larger orchard, it is no coincidence that the fruit trees were planted just below the pa of Hongi Hika on whose patronage the settlers relied. Most sources attribute the planting of the tree in 1819 to Samuel Marsden but another missionary, John Butler, recorded in his journal in August 1819

that he and local Maori workers had planted over 300 fruit trees, so just who placed the tree in the ground will forever remain a mystery.



The pear is even older than New Zealand's oldest buildings, sitting side by side across the road. Now looking its age, the tree is surprising healthy, though the trunk is largely hollow and the base of the tree looks more like a lava flow than a living thing. One story tells of the tree in its prime producing fruit so large that just four pears filled a bucket. Largely protected by a fence within the carpark, there is no reason this tree will not continue to fruit and flourish for a long time yet, though damage to the tree roots beyond the fence is a concern. Happy 200th Birthday, Tree.

📍 The pear tree is in the car park at the end of opposite the Stone Store, Kerikeri.

12. Marsden Estate

The humid north is not the kindest place to grow grapes for wine, but one exception is Marsden Estate. Established in 1993, the winery takes its name from Samuel Marsden, an early missionary who planted the first vines in New Zealand to make altar wine. Set in the lush countryside just out of Kerikeri amid orchards of oranges and olive groves, this four-hectare vineyard produces single-estate wines including pinot gris, chardonnay, syrah, chambourcin, muscat and tempranillo and pinotage, with sauvignon blanc grapes brought in from Marlborough and viognier from Mangawhai. Most of the estate's wine is sold through the cellar door and restaurant.


Popular with the locals, the restaurant and winery are an attractive country-inn style building by local architect Martin Evans. The Mediterranean influenced menu, focussing on fresh local product, suits the relaxed dining atmosphere both on the beautiful, wide terrace overhung with grapevines in the summer, and indoors with a cosy open fire in winter. The view is over the spacious garden and lily pond to the vineyard on the gentle slopes beyond.

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-  56 Wiroa Road, Kerikeri.
 -  Open Summer 10 am to 5 pm, plus Friday and Saturday nights.
Winter 10 am to 4 pm.
 -  09 407 9398
 -  www.marsdenestate.co.nz

13. Christ Church Russell

Like the oldest European building, New Zealand's oldest church is in Northland at Russell. Also known as Te Whare Karakia o Kororareka, Christ Church was built in 1835 with the first service held in January 1836. Simply designed with a hipped roof, the church was significantly altered in 1871. The church survived the sacking of Kororareka by Hone Heke in 1845 but bears the scars of the battle that raged around the church and several bullet holes are still visible. Notable Ngapuhi chief Tamati Waka Nene is buried in the church's graveyard. The church was designated a World Heritage Site in 1983.

Keeping up with the time and although no longer used for services, the church is still consecrated ground and in 2018 the ordination of the first Anglican New Zealander in an openly gay relationship was held in the church.

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-  Church St, Russell.

14. Flagstaff Hill, Russell

Russell began life as Kororareka, and the early settlement, known as the 'hellhole of the Pacific', was notorious for grog shops, brothels and general lawlessness. Despite its reputation it was even the capital of the fledgling colony for a brief nine-month period.

As tensions grew between the Maori and the British, mainly over trade and the imposition of duties and tariffs, Ngapuhi chief Hone Heke was well aware of the symbolic nature of the British flag flying over Russell, regardless of the fact that he had actually gifted the flagpole in the first place. Inspired by talk of revolution by American Captain William Mayhew, Hone hacked down the pole for the first time on 8 July 1844. When it was replaced, he cut it down again in January 1845 and actually flew the US flag from his waka.

The fourth time the flagpole was erected, the lower portion was clad in iron, but this did not deter Hone from cutting down the pole on 11 March 1845; and then, for good measure, he followed this up by sacking the town and burning down many buildings including the Duke of Marlborough Hotel.

Later, in an act of reconciliation, those involved in cutting down the pole erected a new flagstaff in 1857; and in January 1958 a British flag was raised, with the flagpole being named Whakakotahitanga or 'Being at one with the Queen'. This flagpole still stands today.

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-  End of Flagstaff Road, Russell.

15. Putopu bird, Russell Museum

In a simple case in the Russell Museum sits a rather ordinary stuffed bird looking a bit like a weka. It is, however, the only example of an extinct member of rail family and the story of how this bird came to be in the museum is an intriguing tale. Tension was high in Russell in early March 1845 and on March 11 it was decided to immediately evacuate the European residents of the town to Auckland by ship. Hurriedly packing up precious possessions, four year old Catherine Flowerday desperately tried to find her cat Ginger. Boarding the boat, Ginger emerged from the creek and Catherine sweep up the cat in her arms, taking little notice of the bird firmly clenched in the cat's mouth. On board, the ship's mate, an amateur taxidermist, removed the bird which sadly was dead and on leaving the ship in Auckland presented the stuffed bird in a glass case. Years

later, Catherine's great niece, Mrs Elsie Wilkinson presented the bird to the Russell Museum, the only example of the long extinct Putopu.

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- 📍 2 York Street, Russell.
 - 🕒 Open daily 10 am to 4 pm, to 5 pm January only.
 - ☎️ 09 403 7701
 - 🌐 www.russellmuseum.org.nz
 - 💰 Entrance fee.

16. Kawiti Glow-worm Caves

Located near the historic Kawiti marae, these caves combine history, glow-worms and limestone formations. The caves were discovered in the seventeenth century by Roku, the runaway wife of chief Haumoewarangi who successfully used the caves to hide from her husband and his family. Over 200 m in length, up to 20 m at their highest point and 12 m wide, the caves feature delicate stalactites and stalagmites and clusters of glow-worms. Set in a bush-clad limestone valley, the caves are surrounded by cliffs, boulders, caverns and rock pillars. The famous fighting chief Kawiti, who held the British at Ruapekapeka, is an ancestor of this marae. Entrance to the caves is by guided tour only. They depart every 20-30 minutes and includes a short bush walk.

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- 📍 56 Waiomio Road, 5 km south of Kawakawa on SH1.
 - 🕒 Open daily 9 am to 5 pm, guided tours only.
 - ☎️ 09 404 0583
 - 🌐 www.kawiticaves.co.nz
 - 💰 Entrance fee.

17. Mimiwhangata Coastal Park

Beautiful but isolated, this sprawling farm park covers the rolling hills of Mimiwhangata Peninsula. While there are tracks, the signage is erratic, but you can't get lost as it is all open farmland. There are several sandy beaches, the pick of which is the long Mimiwhangata Beach, which is more sheltered and north facing. Attracting few visitors, it is a long drive to get here and the only facilities at the park are toilets.

The peninsula was also the site of a great battle between Ngapuhi and Ngati Manaia.

Mimiwhangata was originally settled by people arriving on the waka Mahuhukiterangi, who eventually formed the iwi Ngati Manaia. Although they later intermarried with Ngapuhi, the relationship was not always an easy one.

Tensions boiled over when Te Waero of Ngapuhi deliberately destroyed a fishing net belonging to Ngati Manaia and, in an act of utu, was killed by Ngati Manaia. Ngapuhi were incensed at the murder and in reply planned to attack the three Ngati Manaia Pa on the Mimiwhangata peninsula: Te Rearea, Taraputa and Kaituna.

To create the greatest confusion, Ngapuhia under their rangatira Te Rangitamaru, decided to attack all three pa simultaneously in the middle of the night. Te Rearea was attacked from the land, while the other two pa were invaded by sea and totally caught by surprise. Ngati Manaia suffered a devastating defeat with a huge loss of life, though their rangatira and some people managed to escape. Kaituna Beach is still considered tapu today.

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- 📍 From Helena Bay take Webb Road for 5.5 km and turn left into Mimiwhangata Road. Continue for another 5 km along this narrow, winding gravel road to the carpark.

18. Ruapekapeka Pa

Ruapekapeka Pa or ‘the bat’s nest’, was the site of the final battle in war of the north in 1845. The British, outnumbering the Maori three to one, were confounded by Kawiti’s innovative defences. Realising that the traditional fortified pa offered little protection from modern weapons, Ruapekapeka featured underground bunkers linked by tunnels and fox holes to protect the defenders from cannon and musket fire. The pa only fell when the Maori, believing the British would not attack on a Sunday, were caught off guard and were forced to abandon it. The outline of the pa is very clear and complemented by good information boards. The pa site has great views over the surrounding countryside. Note that the car park is a little way from the site, and the British position is not to be confused with the actual pa, the entrance of which is marked by a fine carved gateway.

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- 📍 35 km north of Whangarei on SH 1 turn right at Towai into Ruapekapeka Rd. The pa site is 4 km down this road, which is unsealed and narrow in places.

19. Hone Heke Memorial Park, Tokoreireia/Kaikohē Hill

The name Kaikohe is a short version of kaikohekohe or ‘to eat the berries of the kohekohe tree’. This name stems from the aftermath of a battle when the Pakinga Pa fell to attacking Ngapuhi led by Tuohu, and the survivors subsisted on kohekohe trees growing on the hill now known as Tokareireia. It was also on this hill where the warrior Hone Heke Pokai retreated to mourn the fall of Ruapekapeka in 1846 and the death of his friends killed in the battle.

Now the hill is crowned with a monument and gardens in honour of Hone Heke Ngapua, the great nephew of Hone Heke and great great nephew of Hongi Hika. Graduating as a lawyer, Hone began working

for the Native Land Court in 1891 and as a staunch supporter of the Kotahitanga (Unity) Movement, he became leader of the Federated Tribes of New Zealand in 1892. From there he became MP for Northern Maori, a position which he held until his death in 1909. Hone is credited with introducing rugby to the North, and today local teams still compete for the Hone Heke cup.

The entrance to the park starts through a fine carved gateway that incorporates both Maori and Pakeha motifs. It slopes gently uphill past magnificent old trees and through gardens to the monument.

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- 📍 End of Monument Road, Kaihoke.

20. Hokianga Harbour

Discovered by the legendary explorer Kupe, the full name of the harbour is Hokianga-Nui-A-Kupe, The Place of Kupe’s great return. Narrow and long, the harbour winds a surprisingly long way inland as far as Mangamuka Bridge on SH 1, and the sheltered waters were once an important transport link for both Maori and Pakeha travelling west to east.

While geologists will tell us that the harbour is a river valley drowned by rising sea levels, the traditional story of how the Hokianga was formed is a good deal more interesting. There are two different versions of creation of the harbour, and both involve two taniwha.

The first story is relatively simple, and tells that two taniwha lived on either side of the harbour entrance: Niwa made his home on the high sandhills on the north head; Araiteuru lived in a cave on the south head. These two taniwha have just one important task: using their long and very powerful tails, together they stir the water at the entrance to the harbour, creating treacherous waves and strong currents and thereby protecting the people of the Hokianga from enemies invading by sea.

The second story involves just Araiteuru and his children, of which he had eleven and, like all big families, the children found their home in a cave above the beach just too crowded and started to fight among themselves.

One of the children, Waihou, decided to leave home and off he went, burrowing his way far inland until finally he was so tired that he made himself a hole, lay down and slept. This hole filled with water and became Lake Omapere. When Waihou didn't return, his brother Waima began searching for him, creating inlets as he went, until he became hopelessly lost and remains forever in the Punakitere swamp. Next Utakura left to find his brothers ... and on it went until all the taniwha's children had left home, never to return, and in the course of their travels created the eleven major waterways of the Hokianga.

A short walk on the south head known as the Arai Te Uru Coastal Walkway meanders through wind stunted manuka, flax and toi toi and has incredible views north over the giant golden sand hills on the northern shore, and west along the inland waterway of the harbour. Like the north head the hard sandy soil has been shaped by persistent wind, and below the lookout is a lovely sandy cove ideal for a swim on a hot day. But like so many west coast harbours, Hokianga has a treacherous sand bar just offshore from the harbour mouth. Especially dangerous on a south-westerly swell, a pilot service and a signal station were built in 1832 by John Martin, the earliest such service in New Zealand, which continued to operate until 1951. The signal station is still there, though the flagstaff was commandeered for other uses and now graces the Opononi RSA. The access to the south head is via Signal Hill Rd off SH 12.4 km east of Omapere.



On the north head are huge golden sand hills, and exposure for millennia to a combination of wind and rain has shaped the hard sand into deep gullies and wind blasted cliffs and intriguing formations. They are a great place to walk, though be aware that these sand hills are much larger close up than they appear from a distance and walking on the sand can be a strain – so don't be too ambitious. Devoid of any vegetation they are exposed to harsh winds so make sure you take plenty of water in the hot weather and thick clothing in cooler weather. The magnificent golden sand hills are well worth a visit and Hokianga Express Charters runs a water taxi from Opononi wharf on the hour depending on demand.

The statue of Opo the Dolphin outside the Opononi pub commemorates the friendly dolphin whose antics attracted huge crowds and publicity in 1953 before she met an untimely death trapped between rocks. The small museum inside the Hokianga Visitor Centre at Omapere has an Opo display.

Rawene is New Zealand's third-oldest European settlement and is the access point for the ferry to Kohukohu on the northern shore. Among its many old buildings is historic Clendon House built in the 1860s, the home of Captain James Clendon, the first US consul to New Zealand. Several of the older stores are built on tall piles over the water including the lovely Boatshed Café where it is not difficult to while away the time doing not much at all.

On Clendon Esplanade is the Te Ara Manawa Walkway, a short boardwalk complete with information boards that takes only around 20 minutes and allows visitors to walk through mangroves – a common feature of shallow northern harbours. Usually associated with the tropics, the single New Zealand species *Avicennia marina*, subspecies *Australiasica*, is the southernmost in the world but it is only in the Far North that mangroves grow to the size of small trees.

Tucked away in the upper reaches of the harbour beyond Rawene is the Mangungu Mission House. Built on hill with a great view down the harbour, the mission house itself has changed very little from the time when the house was built in 1838, though most of the outbuildings have long gone. The house is stylish in its simplicity with a wide veranda running across the front of the building, an ideal spot to survey comings and goings on the harbour below. The mission still houses the old table on which the third and largest signing of the Treaty of Waitangi took place in February 1840, when the Hokianga chiefs assembled to add their marks to the treaty.

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-  Motukiore Road, 3 km from Horeke.
 -  Limited summer opening hours.

21. Horeke Hotel

There is much contention regarding the oldest pub in New Zealand and as many as six pubs stake a claim. The problem arises over the definition of pub or hotel. Many earlier hotels in New Zealand were very basic